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## Mo. smelter downplays EPA concerns about lead

By CHERYL WITTENAUER (AP) — 1 day ago

ST. LOUIS — The Doe Run Co. on Tuesday downplayed the extent of lead contamination at properties near its Herculaneum lead smelter, but the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency stood by tests showing many neighboring homes had tainted soil.

The agency said Monday that recent tests revealed high levels of lead in the soil of 129 residential properties — or more than a third tested — within a mile of the smelter.

Soil remediation had already been done at about 100 of the 129 properties during the past decade under previous EPA orders. Long-term or repeated exposure to lead can affect the blood and other organs, central nervous system, and harm human reproduction or development.

Doe Run spokeswoman Barb Shepard said the company was "surprised" by EPA's announcement, adding "we were coming to different conclusions from the data."

The company said only 29 of the nearly 400 properties tested had an average level of contamination that exceeds EPA standards for concern, a dramatic improvement over 2001 test results.

But the EPA didn't buy that argument, saying the contamination was "unacceptable" and could result in enforcement action.

"There are places (on the properties) where lead levels are below the threshold and where lead levels are above," EPA spokesman Chris Whitley said. "But to say there's not a problem using averaging defies reason."

Regional acting EPA Administrator William Rice said Doe Run has taken steps in recent years to reduce lead emissions but its efforts have fallen short.

"EPA intends to work with the Missouri Department of Natural Resources to correct this problem by requiring Doe Run to implement a comprehensive, permanent solution to address this persistent problem," he said.

Doe Run said it will work with the agency and residents to resolve the problem.

"We met with our neighbors last week to share the results of the findings," smelter manager Gary Hughes said. "We'll be working with residents and EPA on what needs to be done on each individual property. We want to make sure residents know we care about their families and their concerns, and we'll be keeping the lines of communication open as we work through the process with EPA."

Doe Run's lead smelter in Herculaneum has operated since the late 1800s and is the largest smelter of its kind in the U.S.

During the past 30 years, EPA has cited the company for air emissions, elevated blood lead levels in children, elevated lead levels in yards, and lead dust in homes. Doe Run has bought out 130 residential properties near the smelter since 2002.

The company said it offered to buy 14 of the 29 properties where the average level of lead exceeded EPA standards for concern, but the owners declined to sell.

The EPA suspected last summer that properties were being contaminated again and, in July, ordered Doe Run to sample and test the driveways and yards of homes within a mile of the smelter, Whitley said.

The two primary sources of lead contamination at Herculaneum are smelter emissions and material blown from trucks, he said. The EPA wrote Doe Run earlier this month, saying it had failed to wash, cover, and secure trucks that haul ore and raw material from mines in southern Missouri to the smelter. Doe Run has not yet responded to the claim.

Herculaneum resident Larry O'Leary, who is part of a community advisory group working on the lead problem, said Tuesday he wasn't surprised by the test results but hadn't realized the severity of the problem.

O'Leary gave Doe Run credit for having its emissions meet ambient air quality standards for lead this year. "But on balance," he said, "we have the challenge of truck contamination."

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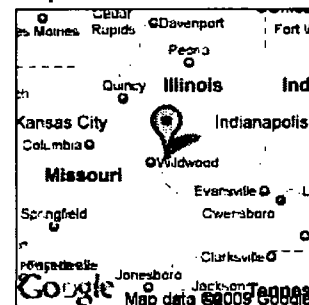
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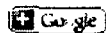
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